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Wind-power companies make pitches to manufacturers

By Anjali Fluker

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Manufacturers in Southeast Michigan looking toward the future could be tapped by global, regional and at least one local startup for opportunities in the wind-powered energy industry.

Nordic Windpower L.L.C., the North American licensee of Sweden-based Deltawind's wind turbine technology, on Wednesday conducted a presentation to a manufacturing sub-group of the state-based Wind Working Group. The meeting was held in conjunction with the "Tomorrow's Energy ... Today!" conference being presented by Detroit-based NextEnergy and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers.

Stevens Taber Jr., chairman and CEO of Nordic Windpower, said the company is seeking a manufacturing partner and is interested in Michigan because of the state's educated and experienced industrial workforce.

"This part of the country has excellent companies that have skills, where they can run big machines and they know how to manage supply chains," Taber told Crain's Wednesday. "And we think (Michigan) could be interested in this high growth industry. So, it's a perfect marriage and a chance ... to create a company with real value."

The session brought together about 40 people who either are interested or are already involved in the burgeoning local wind-energy industry, said John Patten, director of the Manufacturing Research Center at Western Michigan University.

"There's tremendous opportunity," said Patten, also co-chair of the Manufacturing Interest Sub-Group.

Nordic Windpower is the result of \$75 million investment, partly from a Swedish government-funded research program. If a local partner is found, Nordic Windpower would manufacture its products in Michigan, Taber said. The company also is looking for other partners in the U.S. and has offices in India, China and California, he said.

At least three similar companies at Wednesday's presentation already have offices in Southeast Michigan. These companies have similar products either on the market or near commercialization and also are seeking to create joint ventures with local manufacturers.

One is the Bloomfield Hills-based Franklin Energy Group L.L.C., which licensed technology that can, in part, bring a heavy wind turbine generator down to the ground level, said President David Koyle. Research and development on the HOPE turbine, which stands for Hydraulic Oil Powered Energy, took about a \$1.5 million investment so far, which Koyle said was mostly out of pocket.

"We're looking to put up the first prototype in Michigan, if we can find a manufacturer," of the turbines and components, Koyle said. "We're the research and development side and we're looking for a partner to build our technology."

Another competitor in this area is Germany-based Wind To Energy Inc., which has 20 percent of its engineering and marketing operations in Ann Arbor, said Managing Director Frank Weber.

"We're very eager to partner with local (manufacturing) companies," Weber said. "It makes sense because they're right around the corner from us."

Michigan also is home to McKenzie Bay International Ltd. Gary Westerholm, chairman of Midland-based McKenzie Bay, was a featured speaker at the conference during a Wednesday morning session on stationary power and microgrids.

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